DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 356 498 CS 508 074

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TITLE The Director's Transition: Moving On and Moving Up.
PUB DATE Oct 92
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (78th, Chicago, IL, October 29-November 1, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Change; College Faculty; *Debate; Faculty Development; Higher Education; Speech Communication; Teaching Assistants
IDENTIFIERS *Forensic Directors; Professional Concerns

ABSTRACT

In an anecdotal style, this paper offers personal observations on moving from one forensic position to another. It draws on one forensic coach's experiences with five different kinds of programs, discussing in turn the comprehensive Ph.D. university, the graduate teaching assistant administered program, the graduate teaching assistant in a faculty directed program, starting a new program, and assuming the direction of an existing program. The paper concludes by noting that an important transitional skill is the ability to adjust to the interests of the student population of the particular institution. (SR)

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The Director's Transition: Moving On and Moving Up

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CS508074

Paper Presented to the Seventy-Eight Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (Chicago, Illinois-October 29-November 1, 1992)

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Preface

First of all I must thank Chris Leland for putting together these informative panels for the *American Forensic Association*. In my case Chris, being familiar with my background and experiences suggested the title for this paper: *The Director's Transition: Moving On and Moving Up*. I am not sure I would summarize my experiences in this fashion, but I appreciate the compliment. Perhaps a more accurate title would be: *The Director's Learning Experience: Moving On, Up, Down and Around*.

Introduction

Instability in leadership college-level forensic programs seems to be characteristic of the activity. The reasons for this instability are many; the lack of tenure track positions, the labor intensive aspects of the job, variable funding, and career advancement. Given this instability a paper that focuses on the transitional aspects of moving from one forensic position to another is an useful frame of analysis in our field. Having coached in various capacities at four different institutions I have learned about some of the pains and gains of "moving on and moving up."

There are several variables to consider when moving from one program to another. Specifically, the nature of the program you are entering and the level of experience you bring to your new responsibilities are important aspects of the director's transition. This paper is primarily anecdotal in nature, I don't pretend to discuss this issue in any systematic fashion. I only offer my personal observations and experiences.

Nature of Program

I have had differing levels of experience five different kinds of programs:

1) A undergraduate student participant at a P.hD directed program at a public four year comprehensive research institution.

2) A graduate teaching assistant in a GTA administered program.

3) A GTA assistant in a debate-only program at a terminal M.A. degree school.

4) Directing and starting a new program at small private liberal arts college.

5) Succeeding a director at a regional four year university.

Each transition brought a new experience.

Comprehensive P.hD University

On a one level, directing a forensic program at this level offers several advantages. Schools offering graduate programs usually have the opportunity of having one or more graduate assistants working with the forensics program.[1] Another advantage of a comprehensive institutions is larger budgets and a larger base of students to recruit on campus.

However, over the last ten years the number of tenure-track positions being offered in forensics at comprehensive universities has shrank. This trend may reflect an unhappy marriage of duties that is typically imposed on a Director of Forensics in this context. Graduate research institutions are more likely than community colleges or liberal arts colleges to require a record of scholarship in publications and research from its director of forensics.[2] These increased expectations are not matched by a corresponding reduction in teaching or other duties. To be evaluated comparably with their colleagues, forensic directors have to do more.[3] It has been documented that the amount of assigned load given to forensics is in the range of 1/4 to 1/3 of an appointment, while the actual load of the forensic assignment is upwards of 2/3 to 3/4 assignment.[4] Thus, on this basis a forensic director on this level is faced with several distasteful options; Assume a dissapportionate workload in order to qualify for tenure. Delegate large amounts of responsibilities to the graduate teaching assistants and the Director becomes basically a "name plate" to the program. Or finally run the risk of not receiving tenure. My experience has lead

me to conclude that the transition to this level has to be assessed realistically.

Graduate Teaching Assistant Administered Program

Although this situation is somewhat atypical there are still a number of programs that operate on this basis. The transition is usually one of graduate teaching assistant receiving a teaching reduction in order to assume responsibilities in forensics. The pains of transition often are the inability of forensic GTA's to involve themselves in extensive research projects due to the large time commitments required in forensics. This can have significant negative consequences for the graduate student. First it tends to isolate the forensic GTA from other graduate assistants. Thus, limiting their opportunity to exchange and share learning experiences. Second, completing projects such as a dissertation can become extremely difficult. I have yet to witness a forensic GTA complete a dissertation while actively involved with a forensic program. Lastly, it takes a high degree of discipline and organization to qualitatively master a program of study while involved in forensics.

On the positive side, the practical experiences of running a forensic program certainly is worthy a mention

in a student's vita. Additionally, many entry level positions in communication are tied to forensics, thus a student increases their job marketability by establishing their experience in this area.

Lastly, due to the inherent instability of GTA run programs it is important to note that disadvantages the programs has in terms of not having a faculty advocate. Also responsibilities such as recruiting tend to be ignored in this kind of arrangement.

Graduate Teaching Assistant in a Faculty Directed Program

Most of my earlier comments regarding time requirements would apply here as well. Specifically, though there are a number of major transitional differences in entering this kind of context. First, it must be recognized that the Director of Forensic establishes the ideology/coaching philosophy of the program. In an ideal situation a Director of Forensics and the GTA assistant would share a large degree of common philosophy. Ultimately, however differences emerge, and a key transitional aspect is learning to compromise differences. While a certain level of diversity is valuable within a coaching staff it is

important to maintain a degree of consistency when dealing with the undergraduates. Secondly, the level of responsibility for the GTA is established by the Director. Thus, an assistant must be willing to assume the responsibilities assigned by the director.

Starting a New Program

The difficulties in starting a new program cannot be understated. Typically, some of the transitionary aspects include: learning new administrative procedures, recruiting members from scratch and establishing an administrative base of support for the forensic program.

Recruiting is the most important function of the new Director of Forensics. Publicity is an important requirement here.[5] Various promotional activities can be useful in establishing a new squad, including; posters, meeting with pre-law clubs, working with the school paper, having all faculty announcing the establishment of the program to their classes.

Lastly, it is important to mention how difficult the first year is. Typically, a new faculty member may be facing new course preparations or the completion of their dissertation or both. Thus, any new director of forensics need to brace themselves for a tough transition.

Assuming the Direction of an Existing Program

Once again some of my earlier observations would apply here as well. However assuming the direction of an existing program does have one unique aspect. The undergraduate students that the director inherent from the program. First, I believe that the new director has a responsibility to make this transition as smooth as possible. In my case I inherited a Individual Event program while the school hired me to re-establish a debate emphasis. My decision was to extend the scholarships of all students from the prior program for as long as they wanted to compete. Thus, any change in emphasis would have to be accomplished gradually. This was the only fair approach. Students should not be penalized during a transition.

I must confess that my efforts were not altogether successful, most of the returning students decided to quit the program after the first year. This failure in some respects points to importance of coaching 'style'. Any differences in coaching techniques are magnified to the returning student. Additionally, many returning students may feel de-valued as the new director recruits new students to the program. Ultimately, the

personality/philosophy of the director of forensics tends to attract students that are compatible with the director. Thus, there is always an inherent danger when there is a change in leadership.

Additional Thoughts on Transitions

One more additional factor in the *Director's Transition*, is the ability to adjust to general needs of your student population. For example, any school with a fully developed pre-law program/and or a law school tends attract students interested in debate. During my tenure, at a religiously affiliated private school, many students were interested in public address. I have been associated with schools with an integrated speech and theater program that have students highly interested in interpretation of literature. Ultimately, Directors of Forensics are to serve the needs to the student population. An important transitional skill is an ability to adjust to interests of student population.

1. Sharon Porter, "Preliminary Analysis on Promotion and Tenure Survey," Unpublished.

2. Craig A. Dudczak. "Philosophy and Reality at a Research University. Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (71st, Denver, CO, November 7-10, 1985).

3. Ibid., 7.

4. Steve Hunt, "Fifty Great Forensics Programs, unpublished, August 1983, 5.

5. David K. Scott. "Getting Blood From a Stone: Recruiting for a Fledgling Program." A paper presented to the seventy-seventh annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association. October 31 - November 3, 1991 - Atlanta, Georgia.